
ICANN84 | Prep Week – ICANN Grant Program
Wednesday, October 15, 2025 – 17:30 to 18:30 IST

MADELEINE WERBELOW

On Wednesday, 15 October, 2025, 16:30 UTC. My name is Madeleine Werbelow and Daniela Komikova and myself are the participation managers for this session.

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I will now hand the floor over to Giovanni Seppia, the VP of Implementation Operations.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Thank you, Madeleine. And thank you, everybody, for attending this session today. If we can go to the next slide, please, Madeleine. So today we are going to present you with a recap of the first cycle that is going to be followed by where we stand with the grants that

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we have awarded during the first cycle. And afterwards, we will present you and afterwards we'll speak about the internal review of the first grant cycle. We'll wrap up the session with a glance at some of the communication activities that some of our grantees have developed about their projects. And then some final slides to let you know where to find more information about the grant program and also how to contact the grant program department.

With that said, and before we get into the first segment of today's agenda, I'd like to leave the floor to Alan Barrett, who is the chair of the board caucus on the ICANN grant program. Alan, the floor is yours.

ALAN BARRETT

Thank you, Giovanni. this is Alan Barrett. The board caucus on the grant program has an oversight role just to see how things are going, how the project is being managed, but it does not perform any management of the details. That's up to the org staff, Giovanni's team, and also some outside service providers that have been contracted.

So yeah, I just want to thank the team for keeping us all on track. We're in the first tranche of the grant program, distributing almost \$10 million. And we're on track as you'll hear later during the session. Also, I'd like to invite you to another session on Monday in Dublin, the 27th of October. I think it's 01:15 PM local time in Dublin, where the community will have the opportunity to give

input both on the grant program and possible future use of the auction proceeds. So thank you very much. Back to you, Giovanni.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Thanks a lot, Alan. And thank you also again to you and all the caucus member for the great support and guidance you've been providing us over the first cycle. And with that said, I'd like to leave the floor to Madeleine Werbelow. She's the grant program coordinator within the ICANN grant program department. And she's working directly with Shana Robinson, who's the grant program director. And unfortunately, she couldn't make it today. So with that said, Madeleine, the floor is yours to cover the first part of today's agenda.

MADELEINE WERBELOW

Thank you very much, Giovanni. Once again, hello everyone. My name is Madeleine. And I will kick us off with a bit of first cycle recap. Some of this information may look familiar and some of it may be new. So we will be sure to stop at the end of each section to answer any questions that may come up.

Firstly, we will be looking at the outcome of the application evaluation process. Once the application window closed, we ended with 247 applications submitted. There were three withdrawn by applicants, 111 deemed inadmissible or ineligible with a total requested funding of just a bit over \$83 million. We moved on to having 103 applications reviewed by the independent panel. 21

applications did not reach the threshold in one or more assessment criteria. We then had 112 ranked applications with 32 applications shortlisted banked on a rank with a score of 15 or above, which resulted in us having 23 final approved applications, leaving us with a 9.3 acceptance rate and a total funded awarded right around \$9.9 million.

We can then look at the distribution of these grants by region. We're very pleased to see such a strong geographical distribution and diversity among the selected projects. We can then see the grants by countries within this region. Again, this representation demonstrates broad engagement and inclusivity among our grantees, which is very exciting to see for the first cycle of the program. Here we have distribution of grants by theme, and these themes are demonstrating how the grantees' projects are aligned with the different work areas and themes outlined in the applicant guide.

Finally, in this section, we're looking at the distribution of grants by project duration. The parameters for this first cycle were that projects needed to be between 12 and 24 months. You can see on this chart, many of the projects did fall under the 24-month duration. I'm pausing here to see if we have any questions. So far, I'm not seeing any. Oh, we have Anne's hand up.

ANNE AIKMAN-SCALESE

Thank you, Madeleine. Could you go back to the previous slide? I felt like it was so fast. I couldn't really see what the different

categories were, and I think you've clarified that these were categories that we specifically named in the option proceeds work. Is that correct? Can you say a little more about these categories and the distribution in this very interesting slide, please?

MADELEINE WERBELOW

Giovanni, I'll hand it over to you if you want to give a bit more information.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

sure. Thank you, Madeleine. So this slide is based on the content of the project, the 23 grants that we funded within the first cycle. And at the time applicants submitted their projects, they were requested to select one of the two teams and work areas. And those two teams were in line with the objectives of the grant programs. And those that you see in these slides are the work areas that the applicants, when they submitted the projects, they have selected within the online grant management application. So for instance, if you look at the top, there have been three applicants that have selected universal acceptance as the core theme of their project. And indeed, before confirming this pie chart, we have cross-checked, and also this has been the work that has been done during the assessment of the project to make sure that this was indeed the work area associated to that specific project. Because the work area was also used for the distribution of the projects for

the evaluation among the panelists of the independent assessment panel.

So at present, this slide is showing the distribution of the grants by the teams and the work areas that were set within the ICANN grant program first cycle. And we're going to have a slide about where to find more information about each of the projects that we have funded. And in the pipeline is to make sure that there is not only a summary of the project that we publish, but to ensure full transparency of the program, we are going to publish also summaries of the progress that we receive for each of the projects. I hope-

ANNE AIKMAN-SCALESE

Great, thanks so much.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Thank you. You're welcome.

ALFREDO CALDERON

This is Alfredo. I hope you can hear me clearly. So if you go another slide backwards, I was wondering if there's any correlation between the scope of each of the projects that were selected with the country that is sponsoring or doing that project so that we have a clear idea for example the universal acceptance, there were three, are they from the same country or from different countries or continents?

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Thank you Alfredo, that's a very good question and indeed there is a good distribution for instance for the three universal acceptance among the grantees. So in the case of the universal acceptance, to the best of my memory, there is one project from India is about universal acceptance and if I'm not mistaken, there is another project from the United Arab Emirates about universal acceptance. So those are two of the projects that are covering universal acceptance in the 23 finals of grantees for the first cycle.

ALFREDO CALDERON

Thank you.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

You're welcome. And Madeleine, do we have sorry, do we have any other hand up? I don't see any.

MADELEINE WERBELOW

other hands up at this stage. There we are. There's another one.

ADAM PEAKE

Apologies and apologies for joining late. I think I've probably broken my schedule. I wanted to say that one of the grants program recipients will be presenting tomorrow evening at an NCA or tomorrow afternoon actually an NCSG webinar which is in the ICANN engagement program. This is on WSIS plus 20 and particularly capacity building with developing countries around

the WSIS plus 20 review. They will also speak in a NCSG session on Wednesday, Tuesday afternoon in Dublin. So it's nice to see work being done. The initial report is available and I'm sure that will be discussed at the two sessions. So thank you Giovanni. We're seeing from an engagement point of view where I work in ICANN, we're seeing some very useful output from the grants program already. So I think this is pleasant. And Anne for your information, I think somebody will also present tomorrow about the GNSO mapping for this particular topic of this prep week webinar. Thank you.

ANNE AIKMAN-SCALESE

Great. Good to know. Thanks so much. Good to know.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Thank you so much. Thank you for letting us know and thank you. And we know that we have indeed many grantees that are with whom we are having a great interaction. So they keep us apprised about their engagements, their speaking opportunities. And we know that there are some that are going to participate in ICANN 84. So we are looking forward to seeing them there and listening to their presentations. I also was recently involved in a meeting where it was one grantee who spoke about the project that is supported by the ICANN grant program. Is there any other hand up?

MADELEINE WERBELOW

No hands up, but we have a question in the Q&A pod and I'll read it aloud now. It's from Gabza Emmanuel from Cameroon. They say,

hi everyone. Do ICANN have any caucus for follow up support for projects sustainability?

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

And is it possible to clarify the question? You mean in the if we are planning to at the end of the funding, if there is any plan to continue to support the projects? Is this the question?

CMR-GABSA EMMANUEL

Hi everyone. Effectively, that is the question. That is after the project, is there any follow up after the project for sustainability?

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

So at present, there is no application window that is open for the ICANN grant program. And what we have now is 23 funded projects. If at the end of the funding period, the grantee, the organization that applied for funding are free to reapply for a continuation of the project or for a new project. This is what we are currently having in the rules for the ICANN grant program. So again, if you have a specific project that you are currently working on, but is not yet in the funded project list from ICANN, you are welcome to apply in the future grant cycles. And please stay tuned on the ICANN grant program webpage to have information about the future grant cycles.

MADELEINE WERBELOW

Thank you, Giovanni. We have one more question in the chat. I'm sorry if I don't pronounce your name correctly from Raya Zehra. And they're saying, hello all from Yemen, ICANN 84 fellow. Speaking about grant program, what does it include?

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

So I would like to invite you, we have published an ICANN grant program applicant guide, where you can see all the information, you can read all the information about the first cycle. And this was the really key document of reference for the first cycle of the grant program. It includes all the admissibility eligibility criteria to be eligible from an organizational and project perspective for benefiting from the ICANN grant program funds, as well as information about the objectives, teams, work areas, and key elements of the first cycle, such as the duration of projects and the thresholds for funding. So I would recommend you stay really tuned on the ICANN grant program webpage to see what's next and to see if there is an updated grant program applicant guide that will provide the key information for the next cycle.

MADELEINE WERBELOW

Thank you, Giovanni. For now, I believe those are all the questions. So we will move on to the next section, which is yours. So I'll hand the floor back over to you. Thank you, Giovanni.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Thank you, Madeleine. If we can go one slide more, please. So as we said, there was this board resolution at the end of January this year, with which we funded 23 projects. All the grant agreements have been finalized and executed between end of April and early June. And all the projects have also started. And this is something that happened between late April and early September, because there were some projects that started after the grant agreement was signed. The first payment that was disbursed once the grant agreement was signed and the project started, the total amount is a bit more than \$2.6 million, which corresponds to 23% of the available funds that are \$10 million for the first grant cycle. And I will speak in a couple of slides about the process for disbursing the grants to the grantees. So if we can go to the next slide, please.

So in July, we published a list of funded projects on the ICANN grant program webpage. So on that webpage, we published a list of projects, and that you'll see the project title, the organization, the grantee, the country where the organization is based, the region, the project duration, and the grant amount that was awarded to that grantee. Then in early August, and to be more specific on the 1st of August, we have published the summary for each of the funded projects. So if you go to the ICANN grant program webpage, and you see this table with the list of the project, you click on the project title, and you are redirected to a webpage where you can see a summary of the project. And as I said, we plan to not only publish the summaries of the project, but also we plan to publish

summaries of the progress that each project is making during its lifetime.

So this is the information that is currently available. And if we can go to the next slide, you can see that we are currently in the process of collecting the first progress reports from the grantees. And you can see the distribution of the first progress reports across the 23 grantees. So you can see we are going to have a peak of these progress reports delivered to us in November with 13 progress reports that are expected in November. And then gradually, they are going to be submitted to us until February 2026. So, this is the first progress report. The cadence of the progress reports is set within each grant agreement, and it depends on the duration of the project. Most of the projects, as Madeleine has shown in the slide, are having a duration of 24 months, which means that in the grant agreement, there is a cadence of the progress reports, which is every six months.

So, for a project that is lasting 24 months, we are expecting three progress reports every six months, and a final report that is going to be submitted when the project is complete, so at the end of the 24 months. The grantees are compiling those progress reports online on the grant management platform, and those reports consist of an administrative content part, where they illustrate the progress against the activities and milestones as they've been presented within the project they submitted, and also a financial part where they document how they are spending the funds and the progress against the first installment or the previous

installment that they have received. Once ICANN receives the progress report, ICANN starts to assess the progress report against, as I said, the project that was submitted, the activities and the milestones that were set by the grantee for that project. Once, and if everything goes fine, and there is the approval of the progress report, that is the trigger for the further disbursement, the further installment of the funds. So each progress report is associated to one installment of the funds, and therefore the grantee has full interest in meeting the deadline for submitting those reports, making sure that those reports are as accurate as possible, and also to make sure that these reports are approved by ICANN. During the time ICANN is assessing those reports, ICANN can go back to the grantee and ask for information or clarification if something is missing, if there is the need to provide extra information, and that is what ICANN is currently doing with the very first reports that we have received to date. So the disbursement of the funds is really associated to the submission of the progress report by the grantees to their assessment, their approval, and this is enabling us to make sure that we monitor how the projects are progressing and also how they are achieving the different milestones that were set during the submission of the project during the application window. One important thing is that we all know, because those are projects, that those projects are not set in stone. So if at any time we receive a message from a grantee saying, hey, I'm encountering some issues in delivering a certain activity or in achieving a certain milestone, that opens a dialogue with ICANN to see how the grantee is proposing to achieve that milestone

differently or what changes the grantee is proposing to introduce in the project. So there is this process that is ongoing with some grantees as well to make sure that, again, everything is monitored and the funds are disbursed in an accurate manner. I'm pausing here to see if there is any question on this second part of the presentation.

MADELEINE WERBELOW

I don't see any questions in the Q&A pod or any hands up, Giovanni.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

So thank you, Madeleine. We can go to the next slide, which is introducing the next segment of today's session, which is about the internal review of the first cycle. And if you can go one more slide, please. So we are currently in the process of completing the internal review of the first cycle. This is coming from, one, the last recommendation of the Cross-Community Working Group on Auction Proceeds. This recommendation speaks about two kinds of review. The first is an internal review that should be part of the standard operation of the program. This review is meant to be what the recommendation calls lean checking of the program to see that the program is following the processes and procedures that have been set and that the funds are used according to those procedures and processes. And then the recommendation speaks about a broader review, and this broader review should happen every certain number of cycles. It should be more about a strategic review at eye level, and also it should be a review that is

investigating if the chosen mechanism is effectively serving the goals of the program.

In our case, as we have started the first cycle, we are currently looking at the review of the first cycle. So the process that we have followed to date is a process that included a review of the literature that we have produced for the first cycle, as well as interviews with subject matter experts that have supported the first cycle, as well as board members, and also a survey that we have distributed among applicants and grantees. And this is really to check what has gone well, what could have been done differently, what can be improved. This is really checking and looking at the operational effectiveness. If there is room, there is always room to improve and enhance the operational effectiveness of a program, especially when it's a brand new program. And then also we are going to look at identifying areas for improvement in the program design and implementation. So we are currently doing this process for the internal review, and this will inform the next steps of the grant program and will inform refinements to the future of the grant program. So this is where we stand at present with the internal review, and we will continue to keep you updated about the outcome of the internal review, because as I said, this is a crucial step to inform what's next in the grant program. I'm pausing here to see if there is any question.

MADELEINE WERBELOW

I don't see any at this time, Giovanni.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

If not, I'm leaving the floor again to you, Madeleine, to go through the last two segments of today's presentation. Thank you, Madeleine.

MADELEINE WERBELOW

Thank you, Giovanni. In this next section, we'll be looking at some of the key areas and looking at some recent communication activities from grantees. On this slide, we're highlighting three articles that were published by grantees about their funded projects. These articles were made public just a few months ago, and we will be dropping the links to these articles in the chat.

In the grant agreements that were signed by all grantees, it was included that we would require each grantee to share any draft publication or materials with our team before making this public. This process has allowed us to support grantees' communication efforts while ensuring that there's consistency and accuracy among all the information as well. As projects progress, we may see more of these articles come out, which has been exciting to see all the information come out from the grantees. This is just a short slide for this segment, so I'm just checking to see if there's any questions at this stage. I'm not seeing. Oh, there is one from Avri.

AVRI DORIA

Hi. Thanks for taking the question. Could you tell us more about the process used to vet people's to vet the process? To vet the project

publications. What process is set up for reviewing, deciding what information perhaps needs to be redacted or changed? How does that work? Could you describe that?

MADELEINE WERBELOW

Thank you for the question, Giovanni. I'll maybe let you provide a bit more details on the process.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Thank you, Madeleine. Thank you, Avri, for the question. So the grantee is completely free to promote the project and speak about the project. There is a provision in Article 10 of the grant agreement that requires the grantee, in case they like to make communicate or a news item about the grantee in case they like to make communicate or a news item about the grantee in case they like to make communicate or a news item The project with a specific reference to the ICANN and the ICANN grant program to check this language with us to make sure that we ensure consistency in the way ICANN and the ICANN grant program are mentioned in their communication.

There is no restriction for any grantee or anybody to speak about the funding they are receiving, the support that ICANN is giving. Again, the only requirement is this Article 10 of the grant agreement that is asking the grantee to provide us to share with us whenever they want to mention the ICANN grant program or ICANN. Sometimes there are sentences about ICANN, what ICANN does,

and we want to be sure that they know and it's published well what ICANN does or what ICANN grant program is about. So far, the interaction has been great with all the grantees and we have been liaising with the ICANN communications team who has been supporting us for ensuring this consistency whenever there is a reference to ICANN or to the ICANN grant program in any communique, news item, blog that a grantee wants to publish.

AVRI DORIA

Thanks. If I can follow up. So if I understand that it's only words about ICANN that would be discussed, nothing they said about their results, their assumptions, anything of that would need to be. It's only if you mention the word ICANN in discussion.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

That's correct.

AVRI DORIA

Thank you.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Yes.

MADELEINE WERBELOW

Thank you very much. I'm not seeing any other hands up at this time. We'll also have a moment at the end if there's any additional questions. I'll move on to the next segment. Just a bit more

information on where to stay up to date with everything ICANN grant program. We encourage you to please follow along at our grant program webpage or ICANN grant program webpage. The link is here and I've also seen Daniela posting it in the chat. Thank you very much, Daniela.

And if you ever receive any comments or questions or feedback regarding the grant program, we would also very much appreciate if you would pass this information along to us at our grant program at ICANN.org email or also through the ICANN help desk, which will also be routed back to our team. And that's all that we have at this point. But if there's any additional questions or comments, please feel free.

ANNE AIKMAN-SCALESE

Avri's hand up maybe before me. I don't know if that's an old hand or a new hand. thanks, Avri. Just a question really on the timing on the Giovanni referred to some more specific reports on each of the grants that have been made. And I didn't know the timing on that, if that's going to be available for Dublin or not.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Thank you, Anne. We don't think that this information is going to be available because we just received the first progress reports from two of the grantees of the 23 grantees. And we are in touch with them to, as we have asked them to be more specific on some items of the report, as well as to provide us with more information

against some of the activities and milestone that they had specified when they submitted the project. So that is likely not to be available in one week when ICANN Dublin start. We'll make sure that the information is uploaded on the ICANN grant program webpage once the process for assessing and validating a progress report is complete. And it's also what we are going to do is that we are going to ask the grantee, as we did for the project summaries, to also validate what we like to publish as a progress of that specific project. So we want to keep the grantee fully in the loop whenever we publish something about their project on our site.

ANNE AIKMAN-SCALESE

So probably looking for the early next year then maybe.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Yup. Thank you. Absolutely. And again, it will be like for the summaries, it's going to be like really an excerpt, real summary, some lines that are saying what is the progress against what was the project objective.

There is a question about the progress report assessment in the chapter. So we have, so in terms of the progress report evaluation assessment, that really depends on the progress report that we receive. If it's a good one, and it's complete, the assessment goes quite quickly. And we have set a deadline, internal deadline, that is 14 calendar days to assess those reports and interact with the grantee in case we need more information or clarification. Again in

the case of the first two reports that we have received, there were some missing information. So we are currently having a dialogue with the grantee. In terms the second part of the question of the project deadlines and deliverables expected to be planned around these. So we have tried to, let's say, map the project, let's say activities and milestones, as they were set in the project at the time they were submitted with the currents of those reports, as much as possible. Again, as we are looking at projects that they evolve over time, we are in regular dialogue with all the grantees. And we are, of course, following up in case there are discrepancies, in case there are changes. So everything is, let's say, on track in terms of liaising with the grantees and making sure that they are comfortable in also submitting the reports to us.

And I see a question from Giacomo regarding the next call. There's been no decision yet about the opening of the next application window. We are having internal discussion and one of the key elements that will inform the future is the completion of this review of the first cycle that is currently in the final phase. So that is a work in progress. Again, stay tuned on the ICANN grant program webpage to have more information.

MADELEINE WERBELOW

Thank you, Giovanni. We have one question in the Q&A pod at this time as well. And it's asking what happens after the grant application is submitted? How are the evaluations done?

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Thank you for the question. That makes me go back in time when we were really producing the grant program applicant guide where everything is illustrated and explained. So once the application is submitted at the end of the application window, all the applications are going through admissibility and eligibility checks. Admissibility checks for the application, the content, eligibility of the applicant, and all the criteria for the admissibility and eligibility are explained in the ICANN grant program applicant guide. Again, the one that is currently published is the ICANN grant program applicant guide for the first cycle, which means that for the future there might be a different grant program applicant guide. So look at the one that is published as what was done for the first cycle. And again, stay tuned on the ICANN grant program webpage for future grant program applicant guide.

After the admissibility and eligibility check, all the applications that were deemed admissible and eligible, they went through the independent panel assessment. As Madeleine mentioned in her slide, there were 133 applications out of the 247 that were moved to independent panel assessment. And then at the end of the independent panel assessment process, there were applications that were ranked by the independent panel. And then there was the final board decision based on the ranking that was made by the independent assessment panel. You're welcome.

MADELEINE WERBELOW

Those were the only questions that we have for now.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

If there is no other question in the Q&A pod or in the chat, I don't know if Xavier would like to say a few words, as he is the ICANN executive responsible for the grant program, at the end of this session, before I draw this session to a close.

XAVIER CALVEZ

Just to thank everyone for the participation and the interest in receiving your questions is also helping us to adequately pay attention to the aspects of the program that are of interest by the community and the public and therefore be able to communicate also better about it. So thank you. That's always a helpful contribution.

GIOVANNI SEPPIA

Thank you, Xavier. And thank you all the attendees of today's session. That's been really an interesting session. Xavier said we really treasure all the input questions that we receive, because that will help us to move forward the grant program and refine it in the future rounds. So with that said, thank you again to all the attendees. Thank you, Alan, for the initial words. Thank you a lot, Madeleine, for running the slides with me. Thanks, Daniela, Yvette, for your support. And thanks a lot to all the interpreters. And sorry if we have gone so fast at some point. Apology will improve.

So thanks, everybody. Just a reminder, we're going to have this session at ICANN 84 on Monday, the 27th of October at 13:15 UTC, which happens to be the same time as in Dublin. So if you are interested in attending the session remotely or in person, we are looking forward to having you there. Thanks, everybody. Have a nice rest of the day. Bye.

MADELEINE WERBELOW

Thank you.

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